The Historian's Craft

by Marc Bloch

Reflections on the Nature and Uses of History and the Techniques and Methods of Those Who Write It.

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INTRODUCTION

"TELL ME, Daddy. What is the use of history?"

Thus, a few years ago, a young lad in whom I had a very special interest questioned his historian father. I wish I could say of this book that it is my answer. I can conceive no higher praise for a writer than to be able to speak in the same tone to savants and schoolboys alike, but so noble a simplicity is the privilege of the select few. At any rate, this question from a child, whose thirst for knowledge I was not, perhaps, too well able to satisfy at the time, now serves me well as a point of departure. Doubtless there are some who will consider this a naïve approach, but to me it seems entirely to the point.[1] The problem which it poses, with

[1] In which I find myself, from the beginning, in an unlooked-for opposition to the *Introduction aux Études Historiques* of Langlois and Seignobos. The above passage had already been written, when, in the Foreword of the latter (p. xii), I chanced to see a list of "idle questions." There, word for word, appeared the following: "What is the use of history?" It is the same doubtless with this problem as with any problem concerning the *raison d'être* of our thoughts and actions: those minds which by nature are indifferent to them—or have intentionally determined to make themselves so—always find it difficult to understand that other minds find them the subject of absorbing reflections. Nevertheless, since the opportunity is thus offered me, I think it is better immediately to establish my

the embarrassing forthrightness of that implacable age, is no less than that of the legitimacy of history.

Behold, then, the historian called to render his accounts! He does so not without an inner tremor. What craftsman, grown old in his trade, has not asked himself with a sudden qualm whether he has spent his life wisely? The question far transcends the minor scruples of a professional conscience. Indeed, our entire Western civilization is concerned in it.

For, unlike others, our civilization has always been extremely attentive to its past. Everything has inclined it in this direction: both the Christian and the classical heritage. Our first masters, the Greeks and the Romans, were history-writing peoples. Christianity is a religion of historians. Other religious systems have been able to found their beliefs and their rites on a mythology nearly outside human time. For sacred books, the Christians have books of history, and their liturgies commemorate, together with episodes from the terrestrial life of a God, the annals of the church and the lives of the saints. Christianity is historical in

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position, as regards a book which is justly famous and which mine, arranged upon a different and, in certain of its parts, a much less fully developed plan, does not by any means pretend to replace. I was the pupil of both its authors, and particularly of M. Seignobos. Both showed me valuable tokens of their good will. My education owed a great deal both to their teaching and to their work. But both have not only taught us that the historian's first duty is to be sincere; they fully appreciated that the very progress of our studies is founded upon the inevitable opposition between generations of scholars. Therefore, I shall be keeping faith with their teaching in criticizing them most freely wherever I may deem it useful; just as I hope, some day, that my pupils will criticize me in their turn.

another and, perhaps, even deeper sense. The destiny of humankind, placed between the Fall and the Judgment, appears to its eyes as a long adventure, of which each life, each individual pilgrimage, is in its turn a reflection. It is in time and, therefore, in history that the great drama of Sin and Redemption, the central axis of all Christian thought, is unfolded. Our art, our literary monuments, resound with echoes of the past. Our men of action have its real or pretended lessons incessantly on their lips. Of course, differences of group psychology can be noted. Cournot long ago observed that the French people in the mass, everlastingly inclined to reconstruct the world on lines of reason, live their collective memories much less intensely than the Germans, for example.[2] Without doubt, too, civilizations may change. It is not in itself inconceivable that ours may, one day, turn away from history, and historians would do well to reflect upon this possibility. If they do not take care, there is danger that badly understood history could involve good history in its disrepute. But should we come to this, it would be at the cost of a serious rupture with our most unvarying intellectual traditions.

For the present, our discussion has reached only the

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[2] The antihistorical Frenchman: Cournot, *Souvenirs*, p. 43, on the subject of the absence of any royalist sentiment at the end of the Empire, remarks: ". . . for the explanation of the singular fact before us, I believe we must also take into account the scant popularity of our history and the underdeveloped consciousness of historical tradition among our lower classes, for reasons too lengthy for analysis."

stage of probing the conscience. And, indeed, whenever our exacting Western society, in the continuing crisis of growth, begins to doubt itself, it asks itself whether it has done well in trying to learn from the past, and whether it has learned rightly. Read what was written before the war, or, for that matter, what might be written today. Among the confused murmurings of the present, you will almost certainly hear this complaint mingling its voice with the others. I myself chanced to overhear its echo in the very heart of the great drama. It was in June 1940—the very day, if I remember aright, of the German entry into Paris. In a Norman garden, stripped of our troops, we of the general staff consumed our idle hours in ruminating over the causes of the disaster. "Are we to believe that history has betrayed us?" one of us cried. So it was that the anguish of a mature man united its bitter accents with the simple curiosity of the boy. Both demand an answer.

"What is the use of history?"

What is here meant by "use"? But, before proceeding to this question, let me insert one word of apology. The circumstances of my present life, the impossibility of reaching any large library, and the loss of my own books have made me dependent upon my notes and upon memory. Both the supplementary reading and the research demanded by the very laws of the craft I here propose to describe have been denied me. Will it, one day, be granted to me to fill in the gaps? Never

entirely, I fear. I can therefore only ask indulgence. I should say: "I plead guilty," were it not that, by so doing, I might seem overly presumptuous in assuming responsibility for the evils of destiny.

Certainly, even if history were judged incapable of other uses, its entertainment value would remain in its favor. Or, to be more exact (for everyone seeks his own pleasures), it is incontestable that it appears entertaining to a large number of men. As far back as I can remember, it has been for me a constant source of pleasure. As for all historians, I think. If not, why have they chosen this occupation? To anyone who is not a blockhead, all the sciences are interesting; yet each scholar finds but one that absorbs him. Finding it, in order further to devote himself to it, he terms it his "vocation," his "calling."

This unquestionable fascination of history requires us to pause and reflect.

Its role, both as the germ and, later, as the spur to action, has been and remains paramount. Simple liking precedes the yearning for knowledge. Before the work of science, fully conscious of its ends, comes the instinct which guides it. Our intellectual history abounds in examples of similar origins. Even physics began with cabinets of curiosities, and the elves of antiquarianism have cut capers about the cradle of more than one serious study. Such was the genesis of archæology and, more recently, of folklore. Readers

of Alexander Dumas may well be potential historians who lack only training to find the purer and, to my way of thinking, the keener pleasure of true research.

Moreover, this charm will be far from diminished once methodical inquiry, with all its necessary austerities, has begun. On the contrary, all true historians will bear witness that the fascination then gains in both scope and intensity. The same is true of any intellectual discipline, but, of course, history has its peculiar æsthetic pleasures. The spectacle of human activity which forms its particular object is, more than any other, designed to seduce the imagination—above all when, thanks to its remoteness in time or space, it is adorned with the subtle enchantment of the unfamiliar. The great Leibniz himself admitted as much, and, when he turned from abstract speculation on mathematics and theodicy to the deciphering of the ancient charters and chronicles of Imperial Germany, he, like the rest of us, experienced "the thrill of learning singular things." Let us guard against stripping our science of its share of poetry. Let us also beware of the inclination, which I have detected in some, to be ashamed of this poetic quality. It would be sheer folly to suppose that history, because it appeals strongly to the emotions, is less capable of satisfying the intellect.

Nevertheless, were the nearly universal fascination of history its only justification—if it were, in short, only a pleasant pastime, like bridge or fishing—would it be worth all the trouble we take to write it? To write

it, I mean, with integrity, with truth, with the utmost possible penetration into its hidden causes, and, hence, with difficulty? Mere amusement, André Gide has written, is no longer permitted us in our day, even, he added, when it is the amusement of the intelligence. That was said in 1938. In 1942, as I write in my turn, how much graver a significance the remark assumes! Surely, in a world which stands upon the threshold of the chemistry of the atom, which is only beginning to fathom the mystery of interstellar space, in this poor world of ours which, however justifiably proud of its science, has created so little happiness for itself, the tedious minutiæ of historical erudition, easily capable of consuming a whole lifetime, would deserve condemnation as an absurd waste of energy, bordering on the criminal, were they to end merely by coating one of our diversions with a thin veneer of truth. Either all minds capable of better employment must be dissuaded from the practice of history, or history must prove its legitimacy as a form of knowledge.

But here a new question arises. What is it, exactly, that constitutes the legitimacy of an intellectual endeavor?

No one today, I believe, would dare to say, with the orthodox positivists, that the value of a line of research is to be measured by its ability to promote action. Experience has surely taught us that it is impossible to decide in advance whether even the most abstract speculations may not eventually prove extraordinarily helpful in practice. It would inflict a strange mutilation

upon humanity to deny it a right to appease its intellectual appetites apart from all consideration of its material welfare. Even were history obliged to be eternally indifferent to *homo faber* or to *homo politicus*, it would be sufficiently justified by its necessity for the full flowering of *homo sapiens*. Yet, even with this limitation, the question is not immediately resolved.

The nature of our intelligence is such that it is stimulated far less by the will to know than by the will to understand, and, from this, it results that the only sciences which it admits to be authentic are those which succeed in establishing explanatory relationships between phenomena. The rest is, as Malebranche put it, mere "polymathy." Now, polymathy can well assume the form either of recreation or of mania, but it cannot today, any more than in the time of Malebranche, pass for one of the proper tasks of the intellect. Even apart from any application to conduct, history will rightfully claim its place among those sciences truly worthy of endeavor only in proportion as it promises us, not simply a disjointed and, you might say, a nearly infinite enumeration, but a rational classification and progressive intelligibility.

However, it is undeniable that a science will always seem to us somehow incomplete if it cannot, sooner or later, in one way or another, aid us to live better. Moreover, should we not feel this sentiment with particular force as regards history, so much the more clearly destined to work for the profit of man, in that

it has man himself and his actions for its theme? In fact, a long-standing penchant prompts us, almost by instinct, to demand of it the means to direct our actions and, therefore, as in the case of the conquered soldier mentioned above, we become indignant if, perchance, it seems incapable of giving us guidance. The question of the use of history, in the strict and "pragmatic" sense of the word "use," is not to be confounded with that of its strictly intellectual legitimacy. Moreover, this question of use must always come second in the order of things, for, to act reasonably, it is first necessary to understand. Common sense dictates that we no longer avoid this problem.

Certain among our would-be counselors have already given answers to these questions. They have sought to chide our optimism. The most indulgent have said that history is both unprofitable and unsound; others, with a severity which admits of no compromise, that it is pernicious. One of them, and not the least celebrated, has declared it "the most dangerous compound yet contrived by the chemistry of the intellect." These condemnations offer a terrible temptation, in that they justify ignorance in advance. Fortunately for those of us who still retain our intellectual curiosity, there is, perhaps, an appeal from their verdict.

But if the debate is to be revived, it is important that it be based upon more trustworthy data.

For there is one precaution which the ordinary detractors of history seem not to have heeded. Their

words lack neither eloquence nor wit, but they have, for the most part, neglected to ask themselves exactly what it is they are discussing. The picture which they have formed for themselves of our studies has not been drawn in the workshop. It savors rather of the debating-platform than of the study. Above all, it is out of date. Therefore, when all is said and done, it may well be that all their energy has been expended only to conjure away a phantom. Our effort here must be very different. The methods whose value and certainty we shall attempt to assess are those actually used in research, right down to the lowly and delicate technical details. Our problems will be the same as those which the historian's material imposes upon him every day. In a word, our primary objective is to explain how and why a historian practices his trade. It will then be the business of the reader to decide whether this trade is worth practicing.

Let us take care, however. Even thus defined and limited, the task is not so simple as it seems. It might be, were we dealing with one of the practical arts which are sufficiently explained when time-tested manual operations are enumerated one after another. But history is neither watchmaking nor cabinet construction. It is an endeavor toward better understanding and, consequently, a thing in movement. To limit oneself to describing a science just as it is will always be to betray it a little. It is still more important to tell how it expects to improve itself in the course of time. Now, such an undertaking inevitably involves a

rather large dose of personal opinion. Indeed, every science is continually beset at each stage of its development by diverging tendencies, and it is scarcely possible to decide which is now dominant without prophesying the future. We shall not shirk this obligation. The dread of responsibility is as discreditable in intellectual matters as in any others. But it is only honest to give the reader fair warning.

The more so, as the difficulties which every study of methodology encounters vary greatly according to the point which the particular discipline has reached upon the always irregular curve of its development. For example, fifty years ago, when Newton still reigned supreme, it was far easier than today to frame, with all the precision of a blueprint, a thesis on mechanics. But history is still in that stage which is very indulgent of statements of positive certainties.

For history is not only a science in movement. Like all those which have the human spirit for their object, this newcomer in the field of rational knowledge is also a science in its infancy. Or to explain more fully, having grown old in embryo as mere narrative, for long encumbered with legend, and for still longer preoccupied with only the most obvious events, it is still very young as a rational attempt at analysis. Now, at last, it struggles to penetrate beneath the mere surface of actions, rejecting not only the temptations of legend and rhetoric, but the still more dangerous modern poisons of routine learning and empiricism parading as common sense. In several of the most essential

problems of method, it has not passed beyond the first tentative gropings, and that is why Fustel de Coulanges and, even before him, Bayle came very near the truth when they called it "the most difficult of all the sciences."

But is this merely an illusion? However uncertain our road at many points, we are, it seems to me, at the present hour better placed than our predecessors to see a little light on the path ahead.

The generations just prior to our own, in the last decades of the nineteenth century and even in the first years of the twentieth, were as if mesmerized by the Comtian conception of physical science. This hypnotic *schema*, extending to every province of the intellect, seemed to them to prove that no authentic discipline could exist which did not lead, by immediate and irrefutable demonstrations, to the formulation of absolute certainties in the form of sovereign and universal laws. Such was the nearly unanimous opinion at the time, but when applied to historical studies it gave birth, depending upon the temperament of the individual historian, to two opposing schools.

The first believed it really possible and tried their best to establish a science of human evolution which would conform to a sort of pan-scientific ideal. They were willing to abandon, as outside a true science of man, a great many eminently human realities which appeared to them stubbornly insusceptible to rational comprehension. This residue they scornfully called

mere events or happenstance. It was also a good part of the most intimate and individual side of life. Such was, in sum, the position of the sociological school founded by Durkheim. (Of course the early rigidity of principle was gradually softened in practice, though reluctantly, by men too intelligent not to yield before the force of things as they are.) To this great scientific effort our studies are vastly indebted. It has taught us to analyze more profoundly, to grasp our problems more firmly, and even, I dare say, to think less shoddily. It will be spoken of here only with infinite gratitude and respect. If it seems sterile now, that is only the price that all intellectual movements must pay, sooner or later, for their moment of fertility.

The other school of inquirers took a quite different point of view. Unsuccessful in cramming the stuff of history into the legalistic framework of physical science, and particularly disturbed, because of their early training, by the difficulties, doubts, and many fresh beginnings required by documentary criticism, they drew from their inquiries the moral lesson of a disillusioned humility. In the final reckoning, they felt that they were devoting their talents to a discipline which promised neither very positive conclusions in the present, nor the hope of progress in the future. They tended to view history less as truly scientific knowledge than as a sort of æsthetic play, a hygienic exercise favorable to health of mind. They have sometimes been called *historiens historisants*, possessing the truly "historical" point of view; but such a judgment

does injury to our profession, for it seems to find the essence of history in the very denial of its possibilities. For my part, I should prefer to find a more expressive symbol for them in the moment of French thought with which they are associated.

The amiable and skeptical Sylvestre Bonnard, if we accept the dates which Anatole France's book assigns his doings, is an anachronism, quite like the old saints whom the writers of the middle ages naïvely depicted in the colors of their own time. Sylvestre Bonnard (if we grant that fictitious character a moment of existence in the flesh)—the "real" Sylvestre Bonnard, born under the First Empire—would have belonged to the generation of the romantic historians. He would have shared their stirring and prolific enthusiasms, their ingenuous faith in the future of the "philosophy" of history. Let us pass over the epoch in which he is supposed to have lived. Let us restore him to the period in which his imaginary life was written by Anatole France. He can then be regarded as the patron saint of a whole group of historians, roughly the intellectual contemporaries of his biographer. They were profoundly honest workmen, but a little short-winded. We may compare them to the children of debauched fathers, their constitutions had been weakened by wild historical orgies of romanticism. They felt rather small beside their colleagues in the laboratory; they were more inclined to recommend caution than daring. Even so vigorous an intelligence as that of my beloved teacher, Charles Seignobos, once

let fall a saying that may fairly stand as their slogan: "It is useful to ask oneself questions, *but very dangerous to answer them.*" Surely, this is not the remark of a braggart, but where would physics be today if the physicists had shown no greater daring?

Our mental climate has changed. The kinetic theory of gases, Einstein's mechanics, and the quantum theory have profoundly altered that concept of science which, only yesterday, was unanimously accepted. They have not weakened it; they have only made it more flexible. For certainty, they have often substituted the infinitely probable; for the strictly measurable, the notion of the eternal relativity of measurement. Their influence has even affected the countless minds (and, alas, I must number mine among them) which, thanks to defects in intelligence or early training, have been able to follow the great metamorphosis only at a distance and as if by a reflected light. Hence, we are much better prepared to admit that a scholarly discipline may pretend to the dignity of a science without insisting upon Euclidian demonstrations or immutable laws of repetition. We find it far easier to regard certainty and universality as questions of degree. We no longer feel obliged to impose upon every subject of knowledge a uniform intellectual pattern, borrowed from natural science, since, even there, that pattern has ceased to be entirely applicable. We do not yet know what the sciences of man will some day be. We do know that in order to exist—and, it goes without saying, to exist in accordance with the fundamental laws of reason—they

need neither disclaim nor feel ashamed of their own distinctive character.

I should like professional historians and, above all, the younger ones to reflect upon these hesitancies, these incessant soul-searchings, of our craft. It will be the surest way they can prepare themselves, by a deliberate choice, to direct their efforts reasonably. I should desire above all to see ever-increasing numbers of them arrive at that broadened and deepened history which some of us—more every day—have begun to conceive. If my book can help them, I shall feel that it was not in vain. I confess that that is, in part, its aim.

But I do not write exclusively, or even chiefly, for the private use of the guild. The uncertainties of our science must not, I think, be hidden from the curiosity of the world. They are our excuse for being. They bring freshness to our studies. Surely we have the right to claim for history the indulgence due to all new ventures. The incomplete, if it is perpetually straining to realize itself, is quite as enticing as the most perfect success. To paraphrase Péguy, the good husbandman takes as much pleasure in plowing and sowing as in the harvest.

It is fitting that these few words of introduction be concluded with a confession. Each science, taken by itself, represents but a fragment of the universal march toward knowledge. I have given an example above; in order to understand and appreciate one's own methods of investigation, however specialized, it is indispensable

to see their connection with all simultaneous tendencies in other fields. Now this study of methods for their own sake is, in its turn, a specialized trade, whose technicians are called philosophers. That is a title to which I cannot pretend. Through this gap in my education this essay will doubtless lose much in both precision of language and breadth of horizon. I submit it for what it is and no more: the memorandum of a craftsman who has always liked to reflect over his daily task, the notebook of a journeyman who has long handled the ruler and the level, without imagining himself to be a mathematician.

CHAPTER I

HISTORY, MEN, AND TIME

1. The Choice of the Historian

THE WORD "history" is very old—so old that men have sometimes grown weary of it. It is true that they have rarely gone so far as to wish to erase it from the vocabulary entirely. Even the sociologists of the Durkheim school make room for it. They do so, to be sure, only in order to relegate it to one poor corner of the sciences of man—a sort of secret dungeon in which, having first reserved for sociology all that appears to them susceptible of rational analysis, they shut up the human facts which they condemn as the most superficial and capricious of all.

Here, on the contrary, we shall preserve the broadest interpretation of the word "history." The word places no *a priori* prohibitions in the path of inquiry, which may turn at will toward either the individual or the social, toward momentary convulsions or the most lasting developments. It comprises in itself no credo; it commits us, according to its original meaning, to nothing other than "inquiry." Assuredly, since its first appearance on the lips of men, more than two millenniums ago, its content has changed a great deal. Such is the fate of all truly living terms in a language. If the

sciences were obliged to find a new name each time they made an advance—what a multitude of christenings! and what a waste of time for the academic realm!

In remaining quietly loyal to its glorious Hellenic name, our history need be no more like that of Hecatæus of Miletus than the physics of Lord Kelvin or Langevin is like that of Aristotle. What, then, is this history of ours?

At the start, while focusing our attention upon the *real* problems of investigation, it would be pointless to draw up a tedious and inflexible definition. What serious workman has ever burdened himself with such articles of faith? It is not only that their meticulous precision omits the best in every intellectual creation —the half-formed impulse toward a knowledge still undetermined but capable of extension. The worst danger of such careful definitions is that they only bring further limitations. "This subject," declares the Divine Lexicographer, "or that means of treating it, is, no doubt seductive, but—take care, O young apprentice!—it is not history!" Are we then the rules committee of an ancient guild, who codify the tasks permitted to the members of the trade, and who, with a list once and for all complete, unhesitatingly reserve their exercise to the licensed masters? [1] The physicists

[1] [*Translator's note: The following note is only a fragment on a loose sheet. The beginning is lost.*] . . . as Lucien Febvre has pointed out, history itself, when consulted as to the path which the development of mankind has followed, is obliged to contradict them most flagrantly. Not only does each science, taken separately, find its most successful craftsman among the refugees from neighboring

and chemists are wiser—so far as I know, they have never been seen to quarrel about the respective rights of physics, of chemistry, of physical chemistry, or (assuming the existence of such a term) of chemical physics.

It is no less true that, faced with the vast chaos of reality, the historian is necessarily led to carve out that particular area to which his tools apply; hence, to make a selection—and, obviously, not the same as that of the biologist, for example, but that which is the proper selection of the historian. Here we have an authentic problem of action. It will pursue us throughout our study.

2. *History and Men*

It is sometimes said: "History is the science of the past." To me, this is badly put.

For, to begin with, the very idea that the past as such can be the object of science is ridiculous. How, without preliminary distillation, can one make of phenomena, having no other common character than that of being not contemporary with us, the matter of rational knowledge? On the reverse side of the medal, can one imagine a complete science of the universe in its present state?

areas. Pasteur, who renovated biology, was not a biologist—and during his lifetime he was often made to feel it; just as Durkheim, and Vidal de la Blache, the first a philosopher turned sociologist, the second a geographer, were neither of them ranked among the licensed historians, yet they left an incomparably deeper mark upon historical studies at the beginning of the twentieth century than any specialists.

Doubtless, in the origins of historiography, the old annalists were scarcely embarrassed by these scruples. They narrated pell-mell events whose only connection was that they had happened about the same time: eclipses, hailstorms, and the sudden appearance of astonishing meteors along with battles and the deaths of kings and heroes. But into these early reminiscences of humanity, as garbled as the observations of a small child, a sustained effort of analysis has gradually introduced the necessary classification. It is true that our language, fundamentally conservative, freely retains the name of history for any study of a change taking place in time. The custom is harmless, for it deceives no one. In that sense, there is a history of the solar system, because the stars which compose it have not always been as we now see them. It belongs to the province of astronomy. There is a history of volcanic eruptions which is, I am sure, of most lively interest as regards the composition of the earth. It does not concern the history of historians.

Or, at least, it does so only in so far as its observations chance to coincide with the specific preoccupations of our history. How, then, is the division of labor determined in practice? To understand this, a single example will be worth more than a thousand words.

In the tenth century A.D., a deep gulf, the Zwin, indented the Flemish coast. It was later blocked up with sand. To what department of knowledge does the study of this phenomenon belong? At first sight, anyone

would suggest geology. The action of alluvial deposit, the operation of ocean currents, or, perhaps, changes in sea level: was not geology invented and put on earth to deal with just such as these? Of course. But at close range, the matter is not quite so simple. Is there not first a question of investigating the origin of the transformation? Immediately, the geologist is forced to ask questions which are no longer strictly within his jurisdiction. For there is no doubt that the silting of the gulf was at least assisted by dyke construction, changing the direction of the channel, and drainage—all activities of man, founded in collective needs and made possible only by a certain social structure. At the other end of the chain there is a new problem: the consequences. At a little distance from the end of the gulf, and communicating with it by a short river passage, rose a town. This was Bruges. By the waters of the Zwin it imported or exported the greatest part of the merchandise which made of it, relatively speaking, the London or New York of that day. Then came, every day more apparent, the advance of the sand. As the water receded, Bruges vainly extended its docks and harbor further toward the mouth of the river. Little by little, its quays fell asleep. To be sure, this was not the sole cause of its decline. (Does the physical ever affect the social, unless its operations have been prepared, abetted, and given scope by other factors which themselves have already derived from man?) But this was certainly at least one of the most efficacious of the links in the causal chain.

Now, the act of a society remodeling the soil upon which it lives in accordance with its needs is, as any one recognizes instinctively, an eminently "historical" event. It is the same with the vicissitudes of a powerful seat of trade. Hence, in an example entirely characteristic of the topography of learning, we see, on the one hand, an area of overlap, where the union of two disciplines is shown to be indispensable to any attempt at explanation; on the other, a point of transition, where when a phenomenon has been described with the sole exception that its consequences remain undetermined, it is, in some definitive way, yielded up by one discipline to another. What is it that seems to dictate the intervention of history? It is the appearance of the human element.

Long ago, indeed, our great forebears, such as Michelet or Fustel de Coulanges, taught us to recognize that the object of history is, by nature, man.[2] Let us say rather, men. Far more than the singular, favoring abstraction, the plural which is the grammatical form of

[2] Fustel de Coulanges, opening lecture of 1862, in *Revue de Synthèse historique*, t. II, 1901, p. 243; Michelet, course at the École Normale, 1829, cited by G. Monod, *La Vie et la Pensée de Jules Michelet*, t. I, p. 127: "We are concerned at the same time with the study of the individual man, and that will be philosophy —and with the study of the social man, and that will be history." It is proper to add that, much later, Fustel remarked in a more concise and fuller formula, of which the foregoing exposition is hardly more than a commentary: "History is not the accumulation of events of every kind which happened in the past. It is the science of human societies." But this is, perhaps, to curtail the role of the individual too much in history; man in society, and societies, are not precisely equivalent ideas.

relativity is fitting for the science of change. Behind the features of landscape, behind tools or machinery, behind what appear to be the most formalized written documents, and behind institutions, which seem almost entirely detached from their founders, there are men, and it is men that history seeks to grasp.[8] Failing that, it will be at best but an exercise in erudition. The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies.

From the character of history as the knowledge of men derives its peculiar situation as regards the problem of expression. Is it "science" or "art"? About 1800, our great-grandfathers delighted in solemn debates on this question. Later, about 1890, saturated with the aura of a rather primitive positivism, the methodologists were indignant that the public should attach an excessive importance to what they called "form" in historical works. Art versus science, form versus matter: the history of scholarship abounds with such fine debates!

There is no less beauty in a precise equation than in a felicitous phrase, but each science has its appropriate æsthetics of language. Human actions are essentially very delicate phenomena, many aspects of which elude mathemathical measurement. Properly to translate them into words and, hence, to fathom

[8] "Not man, again, never man. Human societies, organized groups." Lucien Febvre, *La Terre et l'évolution humaine*, p. 201.

them rightly (for can one perfectly understand what he does not know how to express?), great delicacy of language and precise shadings of verbal tone are necessary. Where calculation is impossible we are obliged to employ suggestion. Between the expression of physical and of human realities there is as much difference as between the task of a drill operator and that of a lutemaker: both work down to the last millimeter, but the driller uses precision tools, while the lutemaker is guided primarily by his sensitivity to sound and touch. It would be unwise either for the driller to adopt the empirical methods of the lutemaker or for the lutemaker to imitate the driller. Will anyone deny that one may not feel with words as well as with fingers?

3. *Historical Time*

We have called history "the science of men." That is still far too vague. It is necessary to add: "of men in time." The historian does not think of the human in the abstract. His thoughts breathe freely the air of the climate of time.

To be sure, it is difficult to imagine that any of the sciences could treat time as a mere abstraction. Yet, for a great number of those who, for their own purposes, chop it up into arbitrarily homogeneous segments, time is nothing more than a measurement. In contrast, historical time is a concrete and living reality with an irreversible onward rush. It is the very plasma in which events are immersed, and the field within

which they become intelligible. The number of seconds, years, or centuries required for a radioactive substance to change into other substances is a fundamental datum for the atomic scientist. But the idea any particular one of these metamorphoses had occurred a thousand years ago, or yesterday, or today, or that another such is bound to occur tomorrow—all of which would unquestionably interest the geologist, because geology is, in its way, a historical discipline—leaves the physicist perfectly unmoved. In his turn, no historian would be satisfied to state that Cæsar devoted eight years to the conquest of Gaul, or that it took fifteen years for Luther to change from the orthodox novice of Erfurt into the reformer of Wittenberg. It is of far greater importance to him to assign the conquest of Gaul its exact chronological place amid the vicissitudes of European societies; and, without in the least denying the eternal aspect of such spiritual crises as Brother Martin's, he will feel that he has given a true picture of it only when he has plotted its precise moment upon the life charts of both the man who was its hero and the civilization which was its climate.

Now, this real time is, in essence, a continuum. It is also perpetual change. The great problems of historical inquiry derive from the antitheses of these two attributes. There is one problem especially, which raises the very *raison d'être* of our studies. Let us assume two consecutive periods taken out of the uninterrupted sequence of the ages. To what extent does the connection which the flow of time sets between them pre-

dominate, or fail to predominate, over the differences born out of that same flow? Should the knowledge of the earlier period be considered indispensable or superfluous for the understanding of the later?

4. The Idol of Origins

It will never be amiss to begin with an acknowledgment of our faults. The explanation of the very recent in terms of the remotest past, naturally attractive to men who have made of this past their chief subject of research, has sometimes dominated our studies to the point of a hypnosis. In its most characteristic aspect, this idol of the historian tribe may be called the obsession with origins. Moreover, in the development of historical thought, it has enjoyed its moment of particular favor. It was Renan, I believe, who once wrote (I quote from memory, therefore, I fear, inexactly): "In all human affairs, it is the origins which deserve study before everything else." And, before him, Sainte-Beuve: "With curiosity, I scrutinize and make note of all beginnings." The idea is entirely typical of their age. So also is the word "origins." Shortly after *The Origins of Christianity* came *The Origins of Contemporary France.* Not to mention mere followers. However, the word "origins" is disturbing, because it is ambiguous.

Does it mean simply "beginnings"? That would be relatively clear—except that for most historical realities the very notion of a starting-point remains singularly elusive. It is doubtless a matter of definition, but

of a definition which it is unfortunately all too easy to forget to give.

On the other hand, is "origins" taken to mean the causes? In that case, there will be no difficulties other than those which are always inherent in the nature of causal inquiry (and even more so, no doubt, in the sciences of man.)

But there is a frequent cross-contamination of the two meanings, the more formidable in that it is seldom very clearly recognized. In popular usage, an origin is a beginning which explains. Worse still, a beginning which is a complete explanation. There lies the ambiguity, and there the danger!

Some most interesting researches might be undertaken on that embryogenic obsession which is so marked among exegetes. "I do not understand your agitation," Barrès confessed to a priest who had lost faith. "What have the arguments of a handful of savants about a few Hebrew words to do with my feeling? The atmosphere of a church is quite enough." And Maurras, in his turn: "How do the Gospels of four obscure Jews concern me?" ("Obscure," means, I imagine, plebeian; for, as regards Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it would be hard to ignore, at least, a certain literary notoriety). These pranksters are pulling our leg. Neither Pascal nor Bossuet would speak so boldly. Doubtless, a religious experience apart from history is conceivable. For the pure Deist, it is enough to have the inner light to believe in God. But not to

believe in the God of the Christians. For Christianity, as I have already pointed out, is essentially a historical religion: a religion, that is, whose prime dogmas are based on events. Read over your creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ . . . who was crucified under Pontius Pilate . . . and who rose from the dead on the third day." Here the beginnings of the faith are also its foundations.

Now, this preoccupation with origins, justifiable in a certain type of religious analysis, has spread in a doubtlessly inevitable contagion into other fields of research where its legitimacy is far more debatable. Moreover, history oriented towards origins was put to the service of value judgments. What else did Taine intend, in tracing the "origins" of the France of his day, but a denunciation of the political ill consequences of what he considered a false philosophy of man? And whether the subject was the Germanic invasions or the Norman conquest of England, the past was so assiduously used as an explanation of the present only in order that the present might be the better justified or condemned. So in many cases the demon of origins has been, perhaps, only the incarnation of that other satanic enemy of true history: the mania for making judgments.

But let us return to our Christian studies. It is one thing for a troubled and self-searching conscience to determine its attitude toward the Catholic religion by some such code as is daily laid down in our churches;

it is quite another for the historian to explain present-day Catholicism as an observed fact. A knowledge of their beginnings is indispensable to understand, but insufficient to account for, the actual religious phenomena. To simplify our problem, we must postpone the question as to how far the creed, identical in name, is the same in substance. Even assuming our religious tradition entirely unchanging, we must find reasons for its preservation. Human reasons, that is, for the assumption of divine intervention would be unscientific. In a word, the question is no longer whether Jesus was first crucified and then resurrected, but how it came to pass that so many fellow humans today believe in the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Now, wherever fidelity to a belief is to be found, all evidences agree that it is but one aspect of the general life of a group. It is like a knot in which are intertwined a host of divergent characteristics of the structure and mentality of a society. In short, a religious creed involves the whole problem of the human environment. Great oaks from little acorns grow. But only if they meet favorable conditions of soil and climate, conditions which are entirely beyond the scope of embryology.

Religious history has here been cited only by way of example. In any study, seeking the origins of a human activity, there lurks the same danger of confusing ancestry with explanation.

It is very like the illusion of certain old etymologists

who thought they had said all when they set down the oldest known meaning of a word opposite its present sense, having shown, for example, that *bureau* originally meant a coarse woolen cloth, or that *timbre* [4] meant a drum. As if the main problem were not to understand how and why the transition had taken place. As if, above all, the meaning of any word were influenced more by its own past than by the contemporary state of the vocabulary which, in its turn, is determined by the social conditions of the moment. *Bureaux* in *bureaux de ministère* means a bureaucracy. When I ask for *timbres* at my post-office window, I am able to use that term only because of recent technical changes, such as the organization of the postal service itself, and the substitution of a little gummed picture for the stamping of a postmark, which have revolutionized human communications. It is because the different acceptations of the old word, particularized according to profession, are today so widely different that there is no risk of confusion between the *timbre* which I glue on my envelope and the purity of *timbre* which the music salesman praises in his instruments.

We speak of the "origins of the feudal system." Where are we to seek them? Some say: "In Rome." Others: "In Germany." The cause of their confusion is obvious. Whether Roman or Germanic, certain practices, such as clientele relations, companionship in arms, and the use of land tenure as payment for serv-

[4] A postage stamp.

ice, were carried on by later generations in Europe during the ages we call "feudal." But such practices were modified a great deal. There were two words—"benefice" (*beneficium*) among the Latin, and "fief" among the German-speaking peoples—which these later generations persisted in using, while gradually and without realizing it, conferring upon them quite a new significance. For, to the great despair of historians, men fail to change their vocabulary every time they change their customs. All this is very interesting, but it does not tell us the causes of feudalism. The characteristic institutions of European feudalism were no mere patchwork of surviving scraps. At one stage in our history, they arose from a total social situation.

M. Seignobos has somewhere remarked: "I believe that the revolutionary thought of the eighteenth century . . . proceeds from the English thought of the seventeenth." Does he mean by this that the French publicists of the Enlightenment, having read or been indirectly influenced by certain English works of the preceding century, adopted their political principles from them? We might accept this thesis if we suppose that our *philosophes* contributed nothing original in the way of intellectual substance or atmospheric perspective to the foreign formulæ. But even arbitrarily reduced to a matter of borrowing, the history of this intellectual movement is far from being clear. For the problem is still to know why the transference of ideas took place when it did—no sooner and no later. A contagion supposes two things: microbe multiplication

and, at the moment when the disease strikes, a favorable breeding-ground.

In a word, a historical phenomenon can never be understood apart from its moment in time. This is true of every evolutionary stage, our own and all others. As the old Arab proverb has it: "Men resemble their times more than they do their fathers." Disregard of this Oriental wisdom has sometimes brought discredit to the study of the past.

5. *The Boundaries between Past and Present*

Must we believe, because the past does not entirely account for the present, that it is utterly useless for its interpretation? The curious thing is that we should be able to ask the question today.

Not so very long ago, the answer was almost unanimously predetermined. "He who would confine his thought to present time will not understand present reality." So Michelet expressed it at the beginning of his *Peuple*—a fine book, but infected with the fever of the age in which it was written. And Leibniz before him ranked among those benefits which attend the study of history "the origins of things present which are to be found in things past; for a reality is never better understood than through its causes." [5]

But since Leibniz, and since Michelet, a great

[5] Preface to *Accessiones Historicæ* (1700), Opera, ed. Dutens, t. IV 2, p. 53: *"Tria sunt quæ expetimus in historia: primum, voluptatem noscendi res singulares; deinde, utilia in primis vitæ præcepta; ac denique origines præsentium a præteritus repetitas, cum omnia optime ex causis noscantur."*

change has taken place. Successive technological revolutions have immeasurably widened the psychological gap between generations. With some reason, perhaps, the man of the age of electricity and of the airplane feels himself far removed from his ancestors. With less wisdom, he has been disposed to conclude that they have ceased to influence him. There is also a modernist twist inherent in the engineering mind. Is a mastery of old Volta's ideas about galvanism necessary to run or repair a dynamo? By what is unquestionably a lame analogy, but one which readily imposes itself upon more than one machine-dominated mentality, it is easy to think that an analysis of their antecedents is just as useless for the understanding and solving of the great human problems of the moment. Without fully recognizing it, the historians, too, are caught in this modernist climate. Why then should they not feel that, within their province, there has also been a shift in the line which separates the new from the old? What, for example, of the system of stabilized currency and the gold standard which, only yesterday, would have figured as the very norm of up-to-dateness in every manual of political economy? To the modern economist, do they belong to the present, or to a history already reeking with mold?

Behind these confused impressions, it is possible to discover a number of more consistent ideas, whose simplicity, at least on the surface, has captivated certain minds.

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One short period seems somehow set apart from the vast sweep of time. Its beginning was relatively recent, and its end overlaps our own day. Nothing in it—neither its outstanding social and political characteristics, nor its physical equipment, nor its cultural tone—presents any important contrasts with our own world. It appears, in a word, to assume a very marked degree of "contemporaneousness" with us. And, from this, it derives the virtue or defect of being distinct from the rest of the past. A high-school teacher, who was very old when I was very young, once told us: "Since 1830, there has been no more history. It is all politics." One would no longer say "since 1830"—the July Days have grown old in their turn. Nor would one say: "It is all politics." Rather, with a respectful air: "It is all sociology." Or, with less respect: "It is all journalism." Nevertheless, there are many who would gladly repeat that since 1914, or since 1940, there has been no more history. Yet they would not agree very well in other respects as to the reasons for this ostracism.

Some, who consider that the most recent events are unsuitable for all really objective research just because they are recent, wish only to spare Clio's chastity from the profanation of present controversy. Such, I believe, was the thought of my old teacher. This is to rate our self-control rather low. It also quite overlooks that, once an emotional chord has been struck, the line between present and past is no longer strictly regulated by a mathematically measurable chronology. In

the Languedoc high school where I served my first term as a teacher, my good headmaster issued a warning in a voice befitting a captain of education. "Here, with the nineteenth century, there is little danger; but when you touch on the religious wars, you must take great care! " In truth, whoever lacks the strength, while seated at his desk, to rid his mind of the virus of the present may readily permit its poison to infiltrate even a commentary on the *Iliad* or the *Ramayana.*

There are other savants who consider, quite to the contrary and with reason, that contemporary society is perfectly susceptible of scientific investigation. But they admit this only to reserve its study for branches of learning quite distinct from that which has the past for its object. They analyze, and they claim, for example, to understand the contemporary economic system on the basis of observations limited to a few decades. In a word, they consider the epoch in which we live as separated from its predecessors by contrasts so clear as to be self-explanatory. Such is also the instinctive attitude of a great many of the merely curious. The history of the remoter periods attracts them only as an innocuous intellectual luxury. On one hand, a small group of antiquarians taking a ghoulish delight in unwrapping the winding-sheets of the dead gods; on the other, sociologists, economists, and publicists, the only explorers of the living.

6. Understanding the Present by the Past

Under close scrutiny the prerogative of self-intelligibility thus attributed to present time is found to be based upon a set of strange postulates.

In the first place, it supposes that, within a generation or two, human affairs have undergone a change which is not merely rapid, but total, so that no institution of long standing, no traditional form of conduct, could have escaped the revolutions of the laboratory and the factory. It overlooks the force of inertia peculiar to so many social creations.

Man spends his time devising techniques of which he afterwards remains a more or less willing prisoner. What traveler in northern France has not been struck by the strange pattern of the fields? For centuries, changes in ownership have modified the original design; yet, even today, the sight of these inordinately long and narrow strips, dividing the arable land into a prodigious number of pieces, is something which baffles the scientific agriculturalist. The waste of effort which such a disposition entails and the problems which it imposes upon the cultivators are undeniable. How are we to account for it? Certain impatient publicists have replied: "By the Civil Code and its inevitable effects. Change the laws on inheritance and the evil will be removed." Had they known history better, or had they further questioned a peasant mentality shaped by centuries of experience, they would

not have thought the cure so simple. Indeed, this pattern dates back to origins so distant that no scholar has yet succeeded in accounting for it satisfactorily. The settlers in the era of the dolmens have more to do with it than the lawyers of the First Empire. Perpetuating itself, as it were, of necessity, for want of correction, this ignorance of the past not only confuses contemporary science, but confounds contemporary action.

A society that could be completely molded by its immediately preceding period would have to have a structure so malleable as to be virtually invertebrate. It would also have to be a society in which communication between generations was conducted, so to speak, in "Indian file"—the children having contact with their ancestors only through the mediation of their parents.

Now, this is not true. It is not true even when the communication is purely oral. Take our villages, for example. Because working conditions keep the mother and father away almost all day, the young children are brought up chiefly by their grandparents. Consequently, with the molding of each new mind, there is a backward step, joining the most malleable to the most inflexible mentality, while skipping that generation which is the sponsor of change. There is small room for doubt that this is the source of that traditionalism inherent in so many peasant societies. The instance is particularly clear, but it is far from unique. Because the natural antagonism between age groups

is always intensified between neighboring generations, more than one youth has learned at least as much from the aged as from those in their prime.

Still more strongly, between even widely scattered generations, the written word vastly facilitates those transfers of thought which supply the true continuity of a civilization. Take Luther, Calvin, Loyola, certainly men from another time—from the sixteenth century, in fact. The first duty of the historian who would understand and explain them will be to return them to their milieu, where they are immersed in the mental climate of their time and faced by problems of conscience rather different from our own. But who would dare to say that the understanding of the Protestant or the Catholic Reformation, several centuries removed, is not far more important for a proper grasp of the world today than a great many other movements of thought or feeling, which are certainly more recent, yet more ephemeral?

In a word, the fallacy is clear, and it is only necessary to formulate it in order to destroy it. It represents the course of human evolution as a series of short, violent jerks, no one of which exceeds the space of a few lifetimes. Observation proves, on the contrary, that the mighty convulsions of that vast, continuing development are perfectly capable of extending from the beginning of time to the present. What would we think of a geophysicist who, satisfied with having computed their remoteness to a fraction of an inch, would

then conclude that the influence of the moon upon the earth is far greater than that of the sun? Neither in outer space, nor in time, can the potency of a force be measured by the single dimension of distance.

Finally, what of those things past which seem to have lost all authority over the present—faiths which have vanished without a trace, social forms which have miscarried, techniques which have perished? Would anyone think that, even among these, there is nothing useful for his understanding? That would be to forget that there is no true understanding without a certain range of comparison; provided, of course, that that comparison is based upon differing and, at the same time, related realities. One could scarcely deny that such is here the case.

Certainly, we no longer consider today, as Machiavelli wrote, and as Hume or Bonald thought, that there is, in time, "at least something which is changeless: that is man." We have learned that man, too, has changed a great deal in his mind and, no less certainly, in the most delicate organs of his body. How should it be otherwise? His mental climate has been greatly altered; and to no less an extent, so, too, have his hygiene and his diet. However, there must be a permanent foundation in human nature and in human society, or the very names of man or society become meaningless. How, then, are we to believe that we understand these men, if we study them only in their reactions to circumstances peculiar to a moment? It would be an inadequate test of them, even for that

particular moment. A great many potentialities, which might at any instant emerge from concealment, a great many more or less unconscious drives behind individual or collective attitudes, would remain in the shadows. In a unique case the specific elements cannot be differentiated; hence an interpretation cannot be made.

7. Understanding the Past by the Present

This solidarity of the ages is so effective that the lines of connection work both ways. Misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past. But a man may wear himself out just as fruitlessly in seeking to understand the past, if he is totally ignorant of the present. There is an anecdote which I have already recounted elsewhere: I had gone with Henri Pirenne to Stockholm; we had scarcely arrived, when he said to me: "What shall we go to see first? It seems that there is a new city hall here. Let's start there." Then, as if to ward off my surprise, he added: "If I were an antiquarian, I would have eyes only for old stuff, but I am a historian. Therefore, I love life." This faculty of understanding the living is, in very truth, the master quality of the historian. Despite their occasional frigidity of style, the greatest of our number have all possessed it. Fustel or Maitland, in their austere way, had it as much as Michelet. And, perhaps, it originates as a gift from the fairies, quite inaccessible to anyone who has not found it in his cradle. That does not lessen the obligation to

exercise and develop it constantly. How? How better than by the example of Henri Pirenne—by keeping in constant touch with the present day?

For here, in the present, is immediately perceptible that vibrance of human life which only a great effort of the imagination can restore to the old texts. I have many times read, and I have often narrated, accounts of wars and battles. Did I truly know, in the full sense of that word, did I know from within, before I myself had suffered the terrible, sickening reality, what it meant for an army to be encircled, what it meant for a people to meet defeat? Before I myself had breathed the joy of victory in the summer and autumn of 1918 (and, although, alas! its perfume will not again be quite the same, I yearn to fill my lungs with it a second time) did I truly know all that was inherent in that beautiful word? In the last analysis, whether consciously or no, it is always by borrowing from our daily experiences and by shading them, where necessary, with new tints that we derive the elements which help us to restore the past. The very names we use to describe ancient ideas or vanished forms of social organization would be quite meaningless if we had not known living men. The value of these merely instinctive impressions will be increased a hundredfold if they are replaced by a ready and critical observation. A great mathematician would not, I suppose, be less great because blind to the world in which he lives. But the scholar who has no inclination to observe the men, the things, or the events around him will per-

haps deserve the title, as Pirenne put it, of a useful antiquarian. He would be wise to renounce all claims to that of a historian.

Moreover, the cultivation of historical sensitivity is not always all that is involved. It may happen, in a given line, that the knowledge of the present bears even more immediately upon the understanding of the past.

It would be a grievous error, indeed, to think that the order which historians adopt for their inquiries must necessarily correspond to the sequence of events. Even though they restore its true direction afterwards, they have often benefited at the outset by reading history, as Maitland said, "backwards." For the natural progression of all research is from the best (or least badly) understood to the most obscure. Certainly, it is far from true that the light of documentation grows ever brighter as we pass down the corridor of the ages. For example, we are much less well-informed on the tenth century of our era than on the epoch of Cæsar or Augustus. In the majority of cases however, the nearest periods correspond better with the zones of relative clarity. We must add that, in proceeding mechanically from early to late, there is always the risk of wasting time in tracking down the beginning or causes of phenomena which, in the event, may turn out to be somewhat imaginary. The most illustrious among us have occasionally made strange mistakes through having neglected to pursue a prudently retrogressive

method whenever and wherever it was indicated. Fustel de Coulanges devoted himself to the "origins" of feudal institutions of which he had formed, I fear, only a rather confused picture, and to the beginnings of a serfdom which, misled by secondhand descriptions, he conceived in entirely false colors.

Now, more often than is generally supposed, it happens that, in order to find daylight, the historian may have to pursue his subject right up to the present. In certain of its fundamental features, our rural landscape, as has been previously mentioned, dates from a very remote epoch. However, in order to interpret the rare documents which permit us to fathom its misty beginnings, in order to ask the right questions, even in order to know what we were talking about, it was necessary to fulfill a primary condition: that of observing and analyzing our present landscape. For it alone furnished those comprehensive vistas without which it was impossible to begin. Not, indeed, that there could be any question of imposing this forever-static picture, just as it is, at each stage of the journey upstream to the headwaters of the past. Here, as elsewhere, it is change which the historian is seeking to grasp. But in the film which he is examining, only the last picture remains quite clear. In order to reconstruct the faded features of the others, it behooves him first to unwind the spool in the opposite direction from that in which the pictures were taken.

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There is, then, just one science of men in time. It requires us to join the study of the dead and of the living. What shall we call it? I have already explained why the ancient name, "history," seemed to me the best. It is the most comprehensive, the least exclusive, the most electric with stirring reminders of a more than age-old endeavor. In proposing to extend history right down to the present (contrary to certain prejudices which are not so old as history itself), I have no desire to expand the claims of my own profession. Life is too short, and science too vast, to permit even the greatest genius a total experience of humanity. Some men will always specialize in the present, as others do in the Stone Age or in Egyptology. We simply ask both to bear in mind that historical research will tolerate no autarchy. Isolated, each will understand only by halves, even within his own field of study; for the only true history, which can advance only through mutual aid, is universal history.

A science, however, is not to be defined entirely in terms of its object. Its limits can be fixed quite as well by the character of its appropriate methods.

It remains to be seen whether the techniques of inquiry should be considered fundamentally different according as the investigation approaches or recedes from the present. This, in its turn, suggests the entire problem of historical observation.